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ABSTRACT

The relationship between mass mediated symbol systems and the development of subculture were studied through an analysis of the "hardcore" followers of the rock group, the Grateful Dead, i.e., the "Deadheads." As a way of compiling a "thick description" of the kind proposed by Clifford Geertz (1973), several key areas were researched. First, the various symbols and rituals of the 1960s hippie movement that provide sources of identification within the Deadhead culture, such as long hair, tie-dyed clothing, particular styles of music and dance, and the use of hallucinogenic drugs, were analyzed. Second, a questionnaire was administered to 150 volunteers in attendance at several Grateful Dead concerts. The data gathered from the 85 concertgoers who completed the questionnaire were analyzed in an effort to categorize and explain the accounts elicited via the questionnaires, especially those that dealt with how Deadheads interpreted mass-mediated Grateful Dead-related symbols. Third, the needs that individual Deadheads are seeking to satisfy, the degree of satisfaction achieved, and the overall importance individuals placed on participation in the Deadhead culture were examined. Demographic data obtained from the second part of the questionnaire were quantified and statistically correlated to develop a composite profile of the "average" Deadhead. Findings suggest that a certain attraction to the symbols of a subculture may not correlate to an acceptance of the subculture itself. (The questionnaire and 22 footnotes are included; 43 references are attached.) (Author/SG)

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"What a Long, Strange, Trip It's Been": The Grateful Dead, the Deadheads, and the Refiguration of Subculture

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DEBUT PAPER

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Abstract

This paper undertakes a study of the relationship between mass mediated symbol systems and the development of subculture. Specifically, a cultural anthropological approach is integrated with social science methodology in this analysis of the "hardcore" followers of the rock group, the Grateful Dead, i.e., the "Deadheads." By viewing culturally influenced behavior and actions as "a series of interpretations men apply to experience, (which are) constructions of widely varying systems of meaning," (Geertz, 1983) as the grounding for this research effort, the following questions are investigated:

1) How do mass-mediated art forms reinforce and help perpetuate a given culture through the transmission of symbols (narrative, visual, aural, etc.) which are then utilized by members of that culture in order to foster identification and cohesiveness within the socio-cultural system?
2) What factors related to the Deadhead subculture can be compared with, and generalized to, other examples of subcultures in contemporary society- e.g., punks, gangs, non-mainstream religious organizations, etc.?
3) What is different or unique about the Deadheads as a collective as well as on the individual level? What are some of the demographic variables that might help identify and account for individual participants?
4) How do contemporary Deadheads differ from their 1960s counterparts? Even though they may share the same symbols and rituals, are the contemporary Deadheads truly an example of an oppositional culture or are they simply utilizing these symbols and related behaviors for more personal, hedonistic purposes?

As a way of compiling a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of the Deadhead subculture, several key areas were researched. First, the various symbols and rituals of the 1960s hippie movement, e.g., long hair, tie-dye clothing, musical styles, dance, the use of hallucinogenic drugs, etc. that continue to provide sources of identification within the contemporary Deadhead culture were analyzed. Second, a questionnaire was administered to volunteers in attendance at several recent Grateful Dead concerts (Detroit, MI., April 5-6, 1989; Los Angeles, CA., April 21-23, 1989). The data gathered were analyzed in an effort to categorize and explain the accounts elicited via the questionnaires; especially those that dealt with how Deadheads interpret mass mediated Grateful Dead related symbols. Third, the needs that individual Deadheads are seeking to satisfy, the degree of satisfaction achieved, and the overall importance individuals placed on participation in the Deadhead culture were examined. As a final measure, demographic data obtained in the second part of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) were quantified and statistically correlated in order to develop a composite profile of the "average" Deadhead.

DEBUT PAPER

"Sometimes the light is shining down on me,
Other times I can barely see,
Lately, it appears to me,
What a long, strange trip it's been..."

Truckin' by Bob Weir et al.

The Grateful Dead have been an influential force in contemporary American rock and roll culture for more than 20 years. Beginning in 1965 as the aural component of author Ken Kesey's multimedia sensory overload experiment The Acid Test, the Grateful Dead have come to symbolize a set of counter-cultural values that extend far beyond the group's somewhat eccentric approach to the rock music idiom. By music industry standards they sell few records (out of approximately 50 albums by the Dead, collectively and individually, only two have "gone gold," i.e., sold more than 500,000 units), and their music receives limited airplay, yet they have developed a fanatical following- known as the Deadheads, who view the band as a symbol of their attitudes toward mainstream society, e.g., politics, social norms, cultural values, etc. In effect, a Grateful Dead concert can be, and often is, viewed as a ritualistic celebration of this alternative lifestyle; manifested in music, dance, clothes, drug use and other accoutrements associated with the Deadhead subculture.

While usually dismissed by the popular mass media as the last vestiges of the no longer relevant (by today's standards) 1960s hippie movement, the Deadhead "cult" continues to grow and thrive, in part, regenerated by disenfranchised members of a new generation, many not yet born when the Grateful Dead first came onto the rock music scene.

For example, it has been observed that the Grateful Dead are more popular on college campuses today than at any time in the group's history [1]. For many Grateful Dead fans, their loyalty to the group approaches near religious status. They have created and fostered a communal sensitivity which extends beyond the music and the concert hall to their everyday lives. For the majority of followers however, the Grateful Dead related experience is lived only on a part-time basis. One of the unexpected findings arising out of the preliminary research for this project, and a primary focus of this essay, was that the vast majority of Deadheads fit into the latter category. This "part-time subculture" has appropriated the symbols and rituals associated with the 1960s youth counterculture, e.g., long hair, clothes, music, dance, hallucinogenic drugs, etc. However, there are some significant distinctions to be found when comparing the differences that exist between them, differences that can be highlighted through a comparative analysis of the socio-political attitudes and beliefs possessed by the two groups.

Their respective relationships to the Grateful Dead both tie these seemingly disparate groupings together and also separate them. The tie is based on the sharing of symbols and rituals that celebrate those mythic qualities that many of today's youth associate with (and was, to many in this age group) the romantic and rebellious late 1960s hippie movement. The primary difference however, is fairly significant. To

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[1] article in the University of Southern California student newspaper The Daily Trojan, April 12, 1989, pg. 18. Titled "Freedom and love reign in the Deadhead culture," the article details the relationship of today's generation of college students with the Grateful Dead and 1960s values and practices.

most of its participants, the 1960s youth counterculture was all encompassing. The music, drug use, clothes, and other symbols were designed to voice a wide variety of quite specific responses to the dominant culture.

The contemporary 1980s Deadhead appears to be much less committed to the concerns expressed by the 1960s' counterculture. For them, participation in the rituals endemic to the Grateful Dead concert re-creates the 60s countercultural myths without the necessity of having to share a sense of commitment to social change that was clearly the underlying motivation of the 1960s counterculture. For the price of admission, the 1980s' follower of the Grateful Dead can, to varying degrees, experience and participate in the 1960s "myth" without accepting, or even having knowledge of, the original meanings and intentions encoded within the symbols and rituals that make up this experience.

In essence, the 1980s Deadhead is a member of this subculture on a part-time, usually weekend, basis. He or she enjoys certain surface level aspects of the Dead/hippie culture, but in a disembodied sense. That is, the symbols and rituals are perpetuated without the contextualization of social and/or historical specificity. Although the contemporary Grateful Dead fan may act and look like an authentic reproduction of his/her 1960s counterpart, it is a re-production lacking the social and historical elements which are necessary to empower the symbols and behaviors with any substance or meaning. This type of "pseudo-hippie" attends the concerts, engages in the behaviors, wears the clothes, and displays the other symbols in a fashion that is

more akin to that of a carnival-goer or Mardi Gras participant than that of a member of a counterculture which has sprung up in opposition to the sociopolitical mores of the dominant culture.

This essay seeks to gain an understanding of how various symbols and symbolic processes function to define and maintain the Deadhead subculture. Research efforts emanating from the fields of interpretive anthropology and cultural studies have generated what I feel to be some productive approaches (both theoretical and methodological) that are well suited for the investigation of specific cultures. The focus of much of the research in this area is based on the examination of "symbols and symbolic processes and their relationship to social order," (Carey, 1975, pg. 174).

According to Carey, symbols embedded in the visual arts and music provide the means by which members of a given culture make sense out of their lives. Thus, cultural investigation necessarily revolves around the task of "mak(ing) sense out of the senses we make out of life," (Carey, 1975, pg. 179). The cultural approach to communication does not attempt to explain human behavior, but, rather, to understand it. Carey makes the assertation that cultural theorists do not "seek to reduce human action to underlying causes or structures, but to interpret its significance. (We) do not attempt to predict human behavior, but to diagnose human meanings," (pg. 184).

In Carey's view, the challenge is to "grasp hold of the meanings people build into their words and behavior and to make these meanings, these claims about life and experience, explicit and articulate," (pg. 187). From such a perspective, human behavior, in all of its manifes-

tations, forms a text which can be analyzed in much the same way a literary critic approaches a written text. "The text itself is a sequence of symbols- speech, writing, gesture- that contain interpretations. (The researcher's) task, like that of the literary critic, is to interpret the interpretations," (Carey, 1975, pg. 187).

Clifford Geertz, perhaps the leading proponent of the interpretive anthropology school, concurs with Carey's assessment. In his influential book, The Interpretation of Cultures (1973), Geertz writes- "(t)he culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong."

The following passage (from the introduction to the above referenced book) elaborates on this theme and provides an indication of Geertz' objectives: "Believing with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after, construing social expressions on their surface enigmatical," (pg. 5).

Thus, Geertz believes communication research should be geared toward the process of unravelling "a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit and which (the researcher) must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render," (pg. 7).

As a contextual grounding, Geertz proposes what he terms "thick

description," which is based on "piled up structures of inference." What Geertz means here is that the goal of the anthropologist is to strive to uncover and examine "stratified hierarch(ies) of meaningful structures;" for example, understanding the difference between a twitch (physical reaction) and a wink (socially established code).

In Geertz' (1973) view, "(t)he aim of the anthropologist is the enlargement of the universe of human discourse... As interworked systems of construable signs... culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within they can be intelligibly- that is thickly- described," (pg. 14). however, such descriptions alone cannot be construed as part of the reality they are describing. They are, by necessity, interpretations, subject to the sense of reality experienced by the describer. Geertz observes that "the object of study is one thing and the study of it another... In short, anthropological writings are themselves interpretations... They are thus fictions... in the sense that they are something made, something fashioned. Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses," (pg. 15).

Obviously, this approach to understanding culture is a complex matter, because human behavior is itself complex and thus resistant to reductionist approaches and explanations. Addressing this issue, Geertz (1973) offers the following observations: "One can start anywhere in a culture's repertoire of forms and end up anywhere else. One can stay... within a single, more or less bounded form and circle

steadily within it. One can move between forms in search of broader unities or informing contrasts. One can even compare forms from different cultures to define their character in reciprocal relief. But whatever the level at which one operates, and however intricately, the guiding principle is the same: societies like lives contain their own interpretations. One only has to gain access to them," (emphasis mine).

Ten years later, Geertz (1983) was still productively expanding on and refining many of these ideas: "Translation... is not a simple recasting of others' ways of putting things in terms of our own way of putting them (this is the kind in which things get lost), but displaying the logic of their ways of putting them in the locution of ours; a conception which again brings it rather closer to what a critic does to illumine a poem than what an astronomer does to account for a star," (pg. 59). This type of translation arises out of the researcher's "ability to construe their modes of expression, what I would call their symbol systems... Understanding the form and pressure of... natives' inner lives is more like grasping a proverb, catching an allusion, seeing a joke... than it is like achieving communion," (Geertz, 1983, pg. 70).

Admittedly, adopting a Geertzian perspective to the study of a subculture (such as the Deadheads) can often make the researcher feel uncannily similar to that of the plight experienced by someone trapped in a house of mirrors- What is real? What is merely distorted reflection? To use Geertz' own words, "catching their views in our vocabularies... like riding a bicycle... is easier said than done."

However, even in light of such qualifications, the undertaking outlined here draws extensively on the work of Geertz and cultural theorists such as James Carey in endeavoring to answer, or at least shed new light, on what I believe to be several important questions related to subcultural groups in contemporary society:

1) How do mass mediated art forms reinforce and help perpetuate a culture through the transmission of symbols (narrative, visual, aural, etc.) which are then utilized by members of that culture in order to foster identification and cohesiveness within the socio-cultural system?

2) What factors related to the Deadhead subculture can be compared with, and thus generalized to, other examples of subcultures in contemporary society- e.g., punks, gangs, non-mainstream religious organizations, etc.?

3) What is it that is different or unique about the Deadheads as a collective as well as on the individual level? What are the demographic variables that might identify and help account for individual participants?

4) How do the contemporary Deadheads differ from their 1960s counterparts? Even though they share many of the same symbols and rituals, are the contemporary Deadheads truly an example of an oppositional culture or are they simply utilizing these symbols and related behaviors for more personal, hedonistic purposes?

As a way of compiling a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of the Dyadhead subculture overall, several key areas were researched. First, the various symbols and rituals of the 1960s hippie movement, e.g.,

long hair, tie-dye clothing, musical styles, dance, use of hallucinogenic drugs, etc., that continue to provide sources of identification and commonality within the Deadhead culture were analyzed.

Second, a questionnaire was administered to volunteers in attendance at several recent Grateful Dead concerts (Detroit, MI., April 5-6, 1989; Los Angeles, CA., April 21-23, 1989). The data gathered were analyzed in an effort to categorize and explain the accounts elicited via the questionnaires; especially those accounts that dealt with how Deadheads interpret mass mediated Grateful Dead related symbols.

Also addressed were questions related to how Deadheads utilize these symbols to create and perpetuate a sense of community and foster group identification. Lastly, the needs that individual group members are seeking to satisfy, the degree of satisfaction achieved, and the overall importance individuals placed on participation in, and/or association with, the Deadhead culture were examined. As a final measure, demographic data obtained in the second part of the questionnaire were quantified and statistically correlated in order to develop a composite profile of the "average" Deadhead.

II

Although an in-depth analysis of the sixties hippie movement is clearly beyond the scope of this essay, a capsulization of several of the major ideas and manifestations of the hippie subculture might be of some use at this point [2].

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[2] Much has been written and published (of widely varying accuracy and quality) about the 1960s hippie countercultural phenomenon. Some of the better analyses and descriptions of the hippies can be found by referring to the following works: Eisen (1969), Frith (1976, 1981), Gleason (1969), Perry (1985), Taylor

The hippies were possibly the most visible evidence, as so pointedly expressed by one of the more notable voices of the period, Bob Dylan, that "something is happening here, and you don't know what it is, do you Mr. Jones?" (Ballad of a Thin Man, 1965). This "something" that was "happening" was a sense of growing dissatisfaction and frustration with the Eisenhower era values which seemed to bear little relevance to the myriad of complications brought on by social and historical events of the 1960s decade, e.g., the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy, the civil rights struggle, changing social and sexual attitudes, etc.

Even though the hippies were small in number, and generally confined to larger urban areas, e.g., New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, etc., their overall conception of style as visibly manifested symbolically in such outlets as clothing, music, dance, language, etc. were an explosion of color on an otherwise drab sociocultural landscape.[3] Their attitudes toward what had previously been taboo subjects such as sex ("free love"), drug use ("Legalize Spiritual Discovery"), politics ("U.S. out of Viet Nam"), and their seeming willingness to flaunt these views in the face of conservative society (coupled with an innate sense of the theatrical) made them a major focus of mass media attention. Also, interestingly, these divisions were split around age lines ("don't trust anyone over thirty") which further served to reinforce the notion of a youth oriented countercul-

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(1973), and Willis (1981).

[3]. refer to Hebdige (1979) for a discussion of style and its relationship to subculture.

ture at odds with a dominant culture suffering from the curse of old age and senility.

The genesis of this new ideology centered around the city of San Francisco, particularly an area known as the Haight Ashbury [4] (named after the two main intersecting streets through this part of the city- Haight and Ashbury). In retrospect, San Francisco was the logical birthplace of this new culture. Home of a variety of bohemian types; hipsters, beats, druggies, motorcycle gangs, etc., and personalties such as Ken Kesey, Lawrence Ferenghetti, Jack Kerouac, et al., San Francisco, especially the North Beach district, was ripe for the emergence of anything new, different, off-beat, and anti-establishment. Music was a major symbol of these alternative subcultures; jazz, folk music, and rock and roll, being the primary expressions. As radio personality and concert promoter Tom Donahue pointed out in an interview in the music trade magazine Billboard (May 6, 1967); "(t)here are only two constants in the San Francisco hippie scene: music, grass, and LSD." One of the constants in the music described by Donahue was the Grateful Dead.

Groups with exotic names such as the Jefferson Airplane, Quicksilver Messenger Service, and the Grateful Dead soon became the focal points of this burgeoning counterculture for several key reasons. First, rock music has long been associated with oppositional youth rebellion [5]. Second, the San Francisco rock groups represented a new

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[4]. Perry (1985) offers an excellent overview and analysis of the history of the Haight Ashbury hippie scene.

[5]. e.g., Eisen (1969), Grossberg (1983), Marks (1988).

type of youth culture, one that found interest in atypical teenage concerns such as mind expanding hallucinogenic drugs, social and political issues, experimental and avant garde music forms, and a variety of anti-materialistic sentiments. Lastly, through the mass media, especially the recording industry and radio, these attitudes could be, and were being, transmitted to a nation of young people eager to hear the message and to immerse themselves in this new sensory experience.

In the long run, the 1960s hippie movement was destined to self-extinguish for a variety of fairly obvious reasons- naivete, excessive drug use and other self destructive behaviors, hucksters and rip-off artists taking advantage of their dreamy peace and love approach to life, etc. Basically the hippie movement was too much a product of its historical and cultural contexts to exist in any substantive sense outside of its time period. Lack of relevance to the changes many experienced in the 1970s and early 1980s scene was the final death blow; a death caused by disinterest in the issues of the sixties, and a growing turn toward self interest among the would-be participants.

However, in the middle to late 1980s, a dormant seed of the sixties tree seemed to be sprouting. Young people in hippie garb, sporting long hair, advocating and using drugs such as marijuana and LSD, and resurrecting other symbols associated with the hippie movement seemed to be gaining a renewed visibility. This phenomenon was most apparent at rock concerts featuring a self described "group of dinosaurs" which had been quietly but systematically carrying out and living the sixties myths throughout the 1970s and 1980s; all the while

attracting a new generation of fanatical followers. This group, of course, was the Grateful Dead- their followers became known as the Deadheads.

III

The Appropriation of Symbols and Rituals

To help gather supporting evidence form a participant-observer's standpoint, I attended a Grateful Dead concert held in Los Angeles, CA. on April 22, 1989 [4]. I was also able to utilize several books which offer fairly detailed descriptions of a typical Dead concert, as well as viewing a movie featuring the Dead in concert at San Francisco's Cow Palace [7]. These texts, coupled with current newspaper articles [8] and accounts elicited through questionnaires administered at two Grateful Dead concerts provided sufficient textual materials for my analysis of some of the major symbols and rituals associated with the Deadhead phenomenon.

Most of us are familiar with the accoutrements of the hippie lifestyle. The clothes generally include faded blue jeans, army

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[4]. I have also experienced a Grateful Dead concert twice in the somewhat distant past- 1) 4th of July weekend, 1968, Piedmont Park, Atlanta, GA; 2) winter of 1969, Pirate's World, Ft. Lauderdale, FL. Admittedly, these instances bear little relevance to the topic of this essay, but did exert some influence on the author in his formative years.

[7] The Grateful Dead Movie, Warner Brothers Films; Gans & Simon (1985), Grushkin, et al. (1983), Jackson (1984).

[8]. e.g., Los Angeles Times, "At Grateful Dead Concert, the Fans Are the Most Fun," Feb. 13, 1989; Associated Press, "Irvine officials would be grateful if band is banned," May 1, 1989. Also, newsletter type handouts at several Grateful Dead concerts were examined- Dupree's Diamond News, March/April (from concert held in Detroit, MI); Grateful, a fan newsletter distributed for free at Grateful Dead concerts (from concert held in Irvine, CA).

jackets, tie- dyed shirts, blouses, and skirts, work boots and sandals, etc. (the trappings of the "uniform" favored by the hippies of the 1960s). Hair styles favor a long, unkept, windblown look (for both males and females). At a Grateful Dead concert the smell of incense and marijuana is ubiquitous.

Ritualistic behaviors are manifested via the sharing of drugs, especially marijuana, and the dance, which is inextricably tied to the music. The music of the Grateful Dead also deserves some comment. Like the dance form, the music is seamless and fluid. No one musician or instrument stands out above the others, creating a sort of hypnotic drone. Traditional American music forms such as country, folk, blues, gospel, and bluegrass provide the basic roots for the Dead's music. These musical elements are combined with, and transformed by, a sort of free-form, experimental, improvisational approach which has become the group's musical trademark. Their music seems to rely more on intuition and a sense of the moment than on any type of discernible formal structure. A Rolling Stone magazine review of their live-in-concert album Live Dead (Warner Brothers Records 1830) offers the following description of the Grateful Dead's musical approach: "Live Dead... exhibits the group's quite considerable ability in tying together differing song-threads, letting them pass naturally into one another, almost as if they had been especially designed for such a move. A jamming band (and the Dead are that, if nothing else) has to rely on its sense of Flow, on its talent in taking that small series of steps which will ultimately bring it to some entirely different place from

where it started." [9] Symbolically, the music itself in many ways can be seen as an essential aural component of the Deadhead "scene;" both a catylist for, and musical reflection of the Deadhead subculture.

Another major factor which needs to be addressed at this point is the pervasive use of drugs as an integral component of a Grateful Dead concert. The members of the band, both individually and collectively, have been closely linked to the hippie drug scene since the days of author Ken Kesey's Acid Tests in the mid 1960s. [10] For example, throughout most of the group's history they have been closely associated both personally and professionally with the near legendary (in hippie mythology) eccentric LSD chemist Augustus Owsley Stanley III. [11] Besides providing start-up money for the group, Owsley served as road manager and electronics consultant for Grateful Dead concert tours.

At a typical Grateful Dead concert drugs are openly consumed and hawked by dealers in a fashion much like that of a hot dog vendor at a baseball game. An interesting point relates to the type of drugs that are used. Questionnaire responses (to be discussed in detail later in this essay) indicated that the drugs of choice are marijuana, LSD (and related hallucinogens), and mushrooms. 98% of the respondents reported participating in or witnessing the use of these agents. In contrast, there was not one response which described the use of cocaine (or its

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[9]. Rolling Stone, Feb. 7, 1970; review by Lenny Kaye.

[10]. for accounts of Kesey, the Merry Pranksters and the "Electric Kool-Aid Acid Tests (basically a series of multimedia events that revolved around the use of LSD), see: Stevens (1988) and Wolfe (1968).

[11]. Perry (1985), Gans & Simon (1985).

derivatives, e.g., "crack"), heroin, prescription drugs (e.g., barbiturates, amphetamines, etc.), or even alcoholic beverages. Thus, the most commonly used/abused drugs are those which were originally associated with the 1960s hippie movement.

The effects that hallucinogens and marijuana have on their users are qualitatively different than the other drugs outlined above. The use of hallucinogenic drugs such as LSD, mescaline, psilocybin, mescaline, et al. has been associated historically with psychotherapeutic research, [12] consciousness expansion, [13] and literary figures including Aldous Huxley, William Burroughs, and Alan Ginsberg. [14]

Their impact on the user is of a psychological nature- changes in sensory and spatial perceptions, feelings of oneness with the universe, profound religious or philosophical experiences, etc. On the other hand, drugs such as cocaine, heroin, prescriptives, etc. exert effects that are more physical, i.e., body oriented, in nature; generally lacking in the insights identified with hallucinogens. [15] In a discussion of cocaine, heroin, etc., Aldous Huxley wrote that "(a)ll existing drugs are treacherous and harmful. The heaven into which they usher their victims soon turns into a hell of sickness and moral degradation. They kill, first the soul, then, in a few years, the body... The way to

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[12]. e.g., Abramson (1960, 1967), Caldwell (1968).

[13]. e.g., Leary (1973), Solomon (1966), White (1974).

[14]. for example see: Ginsberg & Burroughs (1956), Huxley (1961, 1969).

[15]. Stevens (1988) provides an exhaustive analysis of the points outlined above as well as a detailed assessment of the impact of hallucinogens on contemporary society.

prevent people from drinking too much alcohol, or becoming addicts to morphine and cocaine, is to give them an efficient but wholesome substitute for these... (in the present imperfect world) necessary poisons." [16] Throughout his life, Huxley was interested in finding such a substitute. With the synthesis of LSD on April 19, 1943 by Swiss chemist Albert Hofmann, he believed he had found it.

Although the underlying reasons that might explain why a given Grateful Dead fan might prefer hallucinogenic drugs obviously vary from individual to individual, and are thus open to speculation, the use of these drugs is perceived by many Deadheads as integral to the Grateful Dead experience. A type of oneness, or universality of experience is achieved and reinforced. Like the music, no one concert participant emerges from the crowd. In almost Zen-like fashion, individual egos and identities are de-emphasized; what remains is a type of universal mindset, reinforced through the homological elements, including drugs, which serve to bind the Deadheads and create a sense of group identity.

According to Hebdige (1979), sociologist Paul Willis (1978) first applied Claude Levi-Strauss' term homology to subculture, "using it to describe the symbolic fit between the values and lifestyles of a group, its subjective experience and the musical forms it uses to express or reinforce its focal concerns," (pg. 113). Each symbolic component related to a given subculture is intertwined with its other components.

It is through the "fit" between these symbols that the subcultural participant creates and makes sense of his/her world. By way of explanation, Hebdige offers the following example: "(I)t was the

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[16]. quoted in Stevens (1988), pg. 10.

homology between an alternative value system (Tune in, turn on, drop out), hallucinogenic drugs and acid rock which made the hippy (sic) culture cohere as a whole way of life for individual hippies," (pg. 113).

This is a primary difference between the hippies of the 1960s and the average Deadhead of the 1980s. Although there is the symbolic element at work (as described by Willis), there exists little or no connection between these symbols and rituals and a specific underlying system of beliefs or values. The contemporary Deadhead has appropriated the symbols and rituals without the underlying intent and the historical contextualization necessary to impart meaning to the symbols and actions.

IV

STYLE AS INTENTIONAL COMMUNICATION

In his book, Subculture: The Meaning of Style, Hebdige (1979) discusses the means by which a subculture is constructed as to make "sense" to its individual members. Elaborating on Barthes' (1977) notion that the process of signification attached to a given image is often intentional, and strategically motivated, Hebdige compares the clothes worn by those in "conventional" society with the clothing styles associated with the British punk movement.

Hebdige's analysis demonstrates the importance of distinguishing what he terms "style as intentional communication" (pp. 100-112), and the lack of intention (at least on the conscious level) behind most signs/styles which have been conventionalized in modern society. Hebdige offers the following explanation: "(I)ntentional communication

is of a different order. It stands apart- a visible construction, a loaded choice. It directs attention to itself; it gives itself to be read," (pg. 101).

These visual messages, as well as those communicated via music, slogans, written tracts, ritualistic (ie., socialized) behavioral patterns, etc., act to separate and make distinct a subculture from a "surrounding" or dominant culture. In Hebdige's words, "(t)hey are obviously fabricated... they display their own codes (e.g., the punk's ripped T-shirt) or at least demonstrate that codes are there to be used and abused, e.g., they have been thought about rather than thrown together," (pg. 101).

Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the motives which provide the incentives for a subculture to generate a set of oppositional symbols. Most obvious is the motive to set oneself apart from the dominant culture. This is often achieved through the appropriation of symbols associated with the dominant culture which are then subverted in some fashion (e.g., long hair by the hippies, the crucifix as decorative jewelry by the punks, etc.).

Although it is difficult and often impractical to make generalizations about an individual member's (or faction's), motivations for participating in a subculture's signifying practices, it is important to acknowledge that there can be differences of intent which can be realized through the same symbolic elements. In the case of the Grateful Dead and the Deadheads, this is quite apparent. My analysis uncovered three basic viewpoints which can be attributed to those directly involved in the overall Deadhead phenomenon:

1) The "hardcore" Deadhead who has taken the values and symbols of the 1960s as his/her own and lives life in accordance.

2) The "part-time" Deadhead who enjoys the Grateful Dead experience as a sort of elaborate party or carnival, yet shares little, if any of the values and original intentions behind the symbols/behaviors he/she has appropriated/engaged in.

3) The members of the Grateful Dead themselves, originally a symbol of a subculture that, in effect, no longer exists; now the key focal point and symbol for a subculture that has, for the most part, been refigured in a way incongruent with the original intent.

Various statements by members of the Grateful Dead provide only partial explanation. In relation to the Deadheads, Jerry Garcia, guitarist and recognized "guru" of the Deadhead subculture (although the latter is not a chosen role), has been quoted as saying that "I have nothing say about all this shit. It's just stuff. It doesn't have anything to do with us playing music... The rest of this is really crap... It's groovy for a good thing to happen when you're playing. For people to dance, or you know, to get turned on, or, you know, to do their thing."[17] However, he also seems aware of the intentionality, selectiveness and, implicitly, mindset, exhibited by the Deadheads: "It seems as though there's a certain kind of person in every generation... who can dig what we are doing. We're not trying to win converts or anything; it's there to be discovered."[18]

According to Gans & Simon (1985), "(T)he Grateful Dead came by

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[17]. Marks (1968).

[18]. Gans & Simon (1985), pg. 157.

their system... when the Haight Ashbury was a neighborhood and not yet a magnet for runaways and dropouts. By the time the dream went bust... the Dead's own community was strong enough in terms of the commitment of its members and its economic viability in the real world to go on operating more or less in its own terms. The Dead were also so closely identified with the acid-soaked mind-music of San Francisco that, intentionally or otherwise, they became the keepers of the multi-colored flame," (pg. 159). Thus, even though the Grateful Dead themselves might have down-played their influence, they, at least tacitly, are well aware of their function, possibly even their responsibility, in perpetuating the myths and attitudes associated with the 1960's hippie movement.

The impact of the music composed and performed by the Grateful Dead on their followers has received considerable comment. For example, Bill Graham, the well known concert promoter and manager who owned the Fillmore West (in San Francisco) and Fillmore East (in New York City) concert halls, which were considered Meccas to the 1960s hippie counterculture, has remarked that "(t)he greatest pleasure I get is from seeing and feeling the effect of the Dead's music on whoever is there. Not only are all guards dropped, but it's as if the tsouris door closes and the fresh air door opens. It's time out world- I'm here to have a good time."[17]

This statement underscores the major distinction between those Deadheads who accept and live those values associated with the 1960s hippies and the Deadheads who are there simply to escape the rigors of

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[17]. Gans & Simon (1985), pg. 158.

the dominant society and just "have a good time." Although both sentiments indicate a need that is satisfied through the Grateful Dead and related symbols, intentionality and level of commitment are the distinguishing features which identify and separate them.

The typical contemporary Deadhead is an active member of the overall Deadhead subculture, albeit on a part-time, temporary basis. The difference is that the motives behind this type of participation are based more on sensation seeking and temporary escapism than commitment to social or political change, or even conscious dissatisfaction with the values espoused and endorsed by the dominant culture. Though it could be argued that the use of 1960s countercultural symbols for these ends performs, in itself, a type of homologous function, I would have to disagree, if only on the nature of intentionality. Because homology, in the fullest sense, is the relationship between the signifying practices and those underlying values which influence the "way of life" of a subculture, in the case of the average Deadhead, a true homologous relationship can be seen to exist only on a surface level, devoid of strategic or oppositional purpose or intent.

This observation may not be unique to the followers of the Grateful Dead alone; it may indeed be common within other subcultures as well. What is unique however, is the extent to which the symbols and rituals of the 1960s hippie movement, as personified by the Grateful Dead subculture, have been refigured or subverted to meet the needs of that Deadhead who is only looking for a temporary respite from the demands and expectations of the dominant culture. Separated from the context and motivations which gave rise to these originally

oppositional symbols, today's Grateful Dead fan can re-live the 1960s at a safe distance, without suffering the sanctions imposed by mainstream society on those who dare to question the status quo and/or deviate from acceptable standards of conduct.

In the following section, questionnaire data gathered at several recent Grateful Dead concerts was analyzed. A textual examination of the accounts elicited in section one of the questionnaire and a quantification of demographic type data in section two were outlined in order to provide further documentation to support the observations and arguments presented above.

V

QUESTIONNAIRE DATA

Questionnaires (appendix A) were distributed at two Grateful Dead concerts: Detroit, MI, Crisler Arena, April 5 & 6, 1989; and Los Angeles, CA, Irvine Amphitheater, April 21-23, 1989. From the total sample (N=150), 85 questionnaires were randomly selected for analysis. Ten of these were discarded due to incomplete responses (e.g., leaving individual questions unanswered, illegibility, etc.). The remaining questionnaires (N=75) were broken down based on open-ended responses and demographic data. Open-ended responses were textually, i.e., qualitatively, examined- identifying common metaphors, explanations, linguistic similarities (word choice), expressed values and attitudes, etc. Demographic and numerical data were quantified using basic descriptive statistical procedures, i.e., mean, range, and standard deviation.

The respondents of the final sample set utilized in the study were

68.9% male and 31.08% female (n=75). The mean age was 21.35 (standard deviation=2.49, range=16-29). Geographically, 51.33% were from the southwest U.S., 23.6% from the northeast, 10.67% from the northwest, 6.67% from the southeast, and 5.3% from the central states. Although data from the two concerts, i.e., Detroit, MI and Irvine, CA, were combined on a random basis prior to analysis, the above geographic breakdown is most likely not an accurate representation of the overall Deadhead community. Large urban areas, e.g., New York, Los Angeles, seemed to be overly represented in the sample, probably due to the locations of the concerts where the questionnaires were distributed.

Responses to the question "how long (in years) have you been a fan of the Grateful Dead?" found the mean to be 4.84 years (n=67, [20] standard deviation=2.74, range=1-11). The number of Grateful Dead concerts attended by individual respondents was found to vary considerably (n=72, mean=10.65, standard deviation=15.59, range=1-85). Overall, most reports indicated attending from 1 to 6 concerts but there was also a sizeable minority who had been to 50 or more. 82.35% (n=68) had collections of Grateful Dead recordings at home (albums, CDs, tapes of concerts, etc.). The number of different recordings in individual collections ranged from 1 to 100 (n=56, mean=17.36, standard deviation=24.58). Unlike most pop or rock artists, the Grateful Dead seem unconcerned with the potential for copyright infringements resulting from illegal or bootleg concert recordings. In fact, the

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[20]. differing Ns in the individual questionnaire categories were due to respondents skipping over/not answering the question, illegible responses, or responses which bore no determinable relation to the question (non sequiturs, etc.).

Dead organization sets up "free taping zones" at their concerts which allow, and even encourage, fans to tape the shows. As Jerry Garcia has jokingly proclaimed in several interviews, "(i)f we are ever able to make an album that lives up to our concert performances then maybe we'll worry about it. The music we perform live belongs to our fans as much as it belongs to us." [21]

Although 62.3% of the respondents considered themselves to be "Deadheads" (n=69), there appeared to be little consensus as to the definition of this label. Responses to the question "(h)ow would you define or explain the term Deadhead?" included "dedicated fan," "religious follower," "someone who goes to their concerts," "people who like the music and the casual scene," "a bunch of friendly, colorful people," "someone who basically doesn't have any future, responsibilities, or interests except to get high all the time," "someone who is into the Dead so much that their lives are influenced," and "a good person with heart."[22]

These definitions and associated attitudes/beliefs can be divided into two distinct categories. The hardcore follower, or "true Deadhead" tended to view the Deadhead subculture in terms of "community" or "family," and to consider fellow Deadheads as "brothers and sisters" who share similar sets of attitudes and values. These shared values and attitudes tend to revolve around feelings of dissatisfaction with, and alienation from mainstream society, which they view with suspicion

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[21]. quoted in Jackson (1983).

[22]. all quotations in this section were taken from open-ended responses to questionnaire items.

and distrust. They feel that "society is basically corrupt," "overly materialistic," and "unconcerned with the needs of the individual." To many in this category, being a Deadhead is a counterstatement expressing opposition to the norms and "warped values" espoused by members of the dominant American culture. Overall, the so-called "true Deadhead" shares many of the concerns and commitments originally identified with the 1960s hippie movement. To them, the Grateful Dead experience provides an outlet for their countercultural expressions. The concerts function as a "gathering of the tribes;" the associated symbols and rituals help to reinforce solidarity and cohesiveness among their members. For this group a Grateful Dead concert offers "the knowledge to know that everyone is doing the same thing that you're doing," where "we have our own rules" and "the music is real, not an act like most music today."

However, for the majority of Grateful Dead fans, the concerts and related accoutrements are seen in an entirely different light. To those who fit into this second category, a Grateful Dead concert is a "big party" where "you can get all kinds of drugs cheaply" and "watch all kinds of weirdos acting strange (sic)." This type of fan "enjoy(s) wearing 60s clothes" and participating in "a unique experience that is different from my regular life." They feel that they have little in common with "hippie burnouts" who "only want to bring back the 60s."

As stated earlier, these fans view a Grateful Dead concert much as they would a carnival; a somewhat bizarre sideshow where they can display the visual symbols and engage in the rituals and assorted activities without consideration for, or an understanding of, the

meanings the aforementioned symbols and rituals were originally designed to communicate. For such fans, a Grateful Dead concert provides a temporary release from the constraints and expectations that are part of their everyday lives as members of mainstream American society. The Grateful Dead experience is simply a form of diversionary entertainment, not a manifestation of disenfranchisement from the dominant culture. Their participation is devoid of intent beyond wanting to have a good time. The music, visual symbols, and behaviors are essentially meaningless to them. The Grateful Dead concert is just another sensory encounter, an interesting way to pass the time and enjoy oneself.

Most of those who fall into this category would likely be at odds with the inherent meanings behind the symbols associated with the 1960s hippie movement which have become a central focal point of the Deadhead phenomenon. They see no need for change in a system that has benefitted them. Even though they might go as far as to label themselves Deadheads (because they like the music and have fun at the concerts), when they leave the concert they safely return to mainstream society; their jobs, schools, families, political affiliations, and the values which bind them to the mainstream.

By way of example, one of the items on the questionnaire was designed to examine the political views of the respondents. They were asked whether or not they had voted in the last presidential election. 73% responded in the affirmative (n=74). Of these, 54% voted for George Bush, 34% voted for Michael Dukakis, and 11% for other candidates, e.g., Gus Hall, Jerry Garcia (n=54). This breakdown is

uncannily similar to that of the general population, rather than a supposedly oppositional subculture.

VI

Conclusion

In itself, such an approach to, and utilization of, subcultural symbols and practices cannot be condemned out of hand. However, the appropriation and refiguration of subcultural symbols without regard to their meanings and intent is analogous to watching a foreign language film and enjoying it based solely on the seemingly strange nonverbal behaviors of its characters and the unfamiliar scenery without having a clue of its plot or intended message. It is probably inevitable that a given subculture will attract those who are drawn to its surface elements, if only because they appear to be unique or different. Some human beings, by nature, tend to enjoy or be fascinated by the unfamiliar.

The pressures of modern society necessitate temporary diversions or escapes. Yet most often these diversions are realized through the consumption of products or events which, ultimately, only serve to perpetuate the system which gave rise to these needs. The hippie subculture was based on a refusal to accept the social and political values of mainstream society. When the symbols they created to express this refusal are used for other ends which are not congruent with the original intent, their meaning, and therefore their power to effect change, are relegated to an existence as a footnote in the historical past.

Appendix A

QUESTIONNAIRE

As part of a University of Southern California research project we are collecting information about certain cultural aspects of rock music. We are especially interested in fans and followers of certain rock groups, in this case the **Grateful Dead**. By completing the following questionnaire, you are helping us to better understand what we believe is a unique and important contemporary social and cultural phenomenon. Your participation in this project is greatly (or Grately!) appreciated. Please take your time and answer all of the questions as completely and accurately as possible. Thank you for your assistance in this project.

1) About how long have you been a fan of the **Grateful Dead**?

2) Approximately how many **Grateful Dead** concerts have you attended?

3) About how many **Grateful Dead** albums (or tapes, etc.) do you own?

4) Have you ever purchased **Grateful Dead** related paraphernalia, (for example, T-shirts, posters, bumper stickers, buttons, etc.) ? If so, what exactly?

5) What would you say is the main reason you attend **Grateful Dead** concerts?

6) How would you define or explain the term "Dead Head"?

7) Would you consider yourself a "Dead Head"?

8) If you answered yes to #7, what impact, if any, do you think this has had on your life, e.g., personal values, attitudes, political beliefs, lifestyle, etc.?

9) Have you ever seen drugs being used during a **Grateful Dead** concert? If yes, under what circumstances? What types of drugs?

10) In your words, what do you think is the primary appeal of the **Grateful Dead**? Does the **Grateful Dead** mean anything special to you personally?

11) How similar do you feel you are to other fans of the **Grateful Dead**? Do you believe that you share anything in common with other **Grateful Dead** fans?

12) Compared to other rock groups you like, what, if anything, do you think is unique or different about the **Grateful Dead**?

PERSONAL DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

All information provided in this section is given on a totally anonymous basis, and is strictly confidential.

1) How old are you?

2) Your sex?- Circle one: M F

3) Highest grade or degree completed in school/college?

4) Your occupation?

5) What is your approximate yearly income?

6) Where do you live? City_____ State_____

7) Did you vote in the last presidential election? If yes, for which candidate?

8) What is your racial and/or ethnic origin?

Thank you for your participation. By assisting us in completing this questionnaire you have provided valuable input into what we believe to be an important and relevant undertaking.

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